

April 28, 2005 - Remarks on Martial Law Rule for Budget

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Waiving Requirement of Clause 6(a) of Rule XIII with Respect to Consideration of Certain Resolutions

Mr. Speaker, well, here we are doing another martial law rule and we wait and wait for the conference committee to finish its work, the conference committee that, I might add, did not include a single Democrat, which is unusual. Let me say that again. This conference committee we are waiting for did not include a single Democrat.

Whenever we do a rule to waive two-thirds consideration, it means we will be rushing the underlying bill to the floor, giving the Members virtually no time at all to actually read the bill or determine what it is we are voting on. This time, we are waiting for the fiscal year 2006 budget conference, a bill that will spend more than 2 trillion taxpayer dollars.

Why are we rushing something that is so important and impacts virtually every American? Why do we not just follow the regular order of business set forth in the House rules and let the conference finish its work and file its report and give Members a minimum of 3 days, required by House rules, so they can read and understand the blueprint for spending the taxes? Is that too much to ask? After all, we only have a 2 1/2 -day workweek in the House, and certainly most Americans would not consider that a heavy workload, not compared to the ones they have anyway.

The situation we are faced with today is one that is all too familiar in the House. Yesterday, after 4 months of stonewalling, the majority finally acquiesced and reinstated the proper ethical standards for the House. But we did not find out about their intentions until the early afternoon. And less than 45 minutes later, we were in the Committee on Rules and asked to vote on a resolution we had never been given an opportunity to read.

When the gentleman from Florida (Mr. Hastings) made a motion for a brief adjournment from the Committee on Rules to give members and the gentleman from West Virginia (Mr. Mollohan), the ranking member, time to read the new rules they were being asked to support, we were defeated on a party-line vote.

The bottom line, the majority, after 4 months, decided the new ethics rules had to be passed on an emergency status, in one day; and as a result, no one in the House was given an opportunity to read the legislation.

Where are these emergencies coming from? It is not an emergency the first week of January or February or March, or the first three weeks in April. And, unfortunately, these tactics and the poor administration of the House are all too

common. Today, we are faced with a similar situation on the budget. The situation is sadly all too familiar to the Members of the body: a great crisis has arisen.

The majority expects the House to pass a budget today that no one has seen, and I would like to give a speech right now about what is and is not in that budget, but I am not able to because I have not seen the budget, nor has anyone else, not even the gentleman from South Carolina (Mr. Spratt), the ranking member of the Committee on the Budget. It is truly a remarkable phenomenon that can only be found in Washington.

I guess this majority believes we should take everything they say at face value and we should trust them. However, we have had enough experience to know all too well we cannot do that. In fact, just yesterday on this very floor we discussed how the Committee on the Judiciary's majority staff grossly mischaracterized the work of several Democratic members of that committee. It was truly one of the most offensive acts I have witnessed in my 20 years in Congress and years before that in legislative bodies. And that was just yesterday.

In fact, early in the term I released a 147-page report about the unethical administration of the Congress by its leadership, filled to the brim with tactics just like the one we witnessed this past week and the one we are suffering under today.

That is why I have said and will continue to say that the manner in which this House is administered is not in keeping with democratic values that we as Americans share. We have a shortage of deliberation, democracy, and debate in the House of Representatives, and there is no relief in sight.

In fact, the leadership is asking this body to pass the congressional budget today, a bill which is probably the most important document we will pass in the entire session of the 109th Congress without even a single sheet of paper, and without even one day to review the hundreds of pages contained in the bill. It is the height of arrogance. This is not democracy under any definition of the word, and that is why I strongly oppose this rule and urge my colleagues to vote "no."